

ABC World News Tonight
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1980 CAMPAIGN
BOOK

BRINKLEY: Then there's the question of the briefing book made up for Jimmy Carter to use in a 1980 campaign debate--full of snappy phrases and punchy remarks about the issues of that time. But somehow, either the Carter camp leaked it to the Reagan camp, or somebody stole it. In any case, it wound up in the Reagan staff's hands, and now the Democrats are asking questions about it, and Reagan officials have answered, by letter. Here's Sam Donaldson at the White House.

DONALDSON: In their letters to Capitol Hill today, top White House officials acknowledged they knowing used briefing material

obtained from the Carter camp to prepare then-Governor Reagan for the Carter-Reagan debate. But they said they didn't know how their side obtained the material, and it wasn't very important anyway. Budget Director David Stockman, who played the Carter practice stand-in role with then-Governor Reagan said he received a 'thick unbound set of papers... which appeared to be a compilation of policy issues.' He said, 'it was apparent to me at the time that they had in some way come from the Carter campaign.' 'I found the documents useful,' he said. Communications Director David Gergen, responsible for editing materials for the Reagan debate team said he does 'not recall seeing such material,' but he does recall 'hearing that it existed.' Chief of Staff James Baker, then the Reagan debate coordinator, said he does 'remember briefly seeing a large loose leaf bound book that was thought to have been given to the Reagan camp by someone with the Carter campaign.' Baker said he didn't know then or now how it was obtained, but that William Casey, then campaign manager, gave it to him. But there the trail grows cold, because Casey, now CIA Director, says he has no recollection that he ever '...received, heard of, or learned in any other way of a set of papers which laid out the Carter debate plan.' However, Casey does not answer the question of whether he ever saw any material obtained from the Carter camp. The House sub-committee chairman, a Democrat who's looking into the matter, says he won't accept today's, 'We don't know how it happened,' response. REP. DONALD ALBOSTA (D-Mich.): Maybe we ought to just get the papers and see if there's legs on them, maybe they just walked over there. But, that isn't the case, of course, and what we have to find out is, basically I believe, is how they got there, and who might be involved.

DONALADSON: None of the four Reagan officials would agree on a telephone interview on this subject today. They say the Democrats are simply playing politics with a matter that is inconsequential. But with the Democrats already calling for the appointment of a special prosecutor, it is unlikely that this matter will simply fade away. Sam Donaldson, ABC News, the White House.